critical digest

VOL. III No. 40 10 June 11, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Opening This Week

Courtin' Time-National, 6/13/51. Musical version by William Roos of "The Farmer's Wife" play by Eden Phillpotts, with lyrics and music by Jack Lawrence and Don Walker. Stage by Alfred Drake. Cast features Joe E. Brown, Billie Worth and Carmen Mathews.

Digests of Current Reviews

Oklahoma-Broadway, 5/29/51. It's still unanimous. Variety, Billboard, Cue, Christian Science Monitor, George Jean Nathan and Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun agree that Rodgers and Hammerstein revival remains something to shout about. Limited run production by National Company received praise in all departments. Ridge Bond and Patricia Northrop were lauded for heading fine, young, energetic cast. Critics recommended show as perfect "low" price summer entertainment. Hobe, Variety, found it a graphic illustration of how R&H have expanded and developed their musical play form. Because the songs haven't been played recently, they seem to retain much of their original freshness, noted Keating, Cue. George Jean Nation took opportunity to answer those who called Hammerstein's lyrics too sentimental and Rodgers' music too melodious. This is downright silly for R&H are just about perfect in their own light, casual way. News magazine critics didn't file reviews.

Flahooley-Broadhurst, 5/14/51. Current Harburg-Saidy "magical musical" is Finian Rainbow gone wrong, comments Kerr, Commonweal. It repeats the formula almost too carefully, but the elements have failed to come together comfortably. The authors this time are busy, belligerent and humorless: resulting in didacticism rather than satire. Howard Bay's sets are the best feature of the evening.

Twentieth Century-Fulton, 12/24/50. Robert Preston received praise of four daily critics who revisited revival of Hecht-MacArthur play produced by Jose Ferrer. While Binnie Barnes received a split decision. Bron, Variety, and Garland, Journal American, were very disappointed with weak performances turned in by the Hollywood movie star. But they joined Hawkins, WT&S, and Eaton, L.I.Press, in complimenting Preston. Remainder of critics didn't cover replacements for Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson. Hawkins noted that Miss Barnes almost suffered an accident during the curtain calls. George Matthews subbing for Robert Strauss as the press agent was considered better than the original.

Summer Season Opens

Grist Mill Playhouse, Andover, N.J. opened summer tryout circuit with a Robert E. Perry presentation of the English drama Background by Warren Chatham Strode. Glib, Variety, believes it has limited commercial possibilities, but may prove useful for strawhat theatres hunting for one set plays.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Critics beware. Variety's dreaded box score isn't as dead as you may think. Unless the daily reviewers cut down their number of no opinion votes, the trade paper will resume the box score. This season it counted 58 no opinion reviews, as against only 23 last term. Heading list of lenient reviewers were Pollock, Compass (.550), Chapman, New (.533), and Hawkins, WT&S (.526). Harshest was Garland, Journal American (.300). Trade paper lists favorable, unfavorable and no opinion reviews of daily critics the first week after the opening.

Copyright 1951 by T.M.Kraus, 505 5th Ave. N.Y.17 MU 2-0326 $10 Yearly

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr. Science Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "Pro".

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50. - Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29. None: 16-21-23-28.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50. - Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.

DARKNESS AT NOON-1/13/51. - Con: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29. None: 25-28. So-So: 5-12-13-23.

FLAHOOLEY-5/14/51. - Con: 1-2-6-8-12-15-17-18-22-23-24-26-27-28-30. None: 19-20-21-25-29.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50. - Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.

GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51. - Con: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-14-17-22-25-26-27-30. None: 13-15-16-19-20-21-23-24-28-29.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50. - Con: 28.

THE HAPPY TIME-1/24/50. - Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30. None: 10-21.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51. - Con: 28. None: 19-21.

KISS ME KATE-12/31/48. - Con: 29. None: 21-28.

MAKE A WISH-4/18/51. - Con: 1-5-6-14-23-24-27-28-29-30. None: 19-21-25.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51. - Con: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.

OKLAHOMA-5/29/51. - None: 12-13-14-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30.

THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51. - Con: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. None: 12-20-22.

SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50. - Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/8/49. - Con: 27. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.

STALAG 17-5/8/51. - Con: 4-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 13-19-20-21.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51. - Con: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28. None: 15-19-21.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-12/24/50. - Con: 5-21-24-28. None: 4-14-15-16.

' Record Notes '

Mary Martin recording all of Rodgers and Hart hits...A New York store is selling albums at 80 per cent off, informs Kilgallen, Journal American...Columbia Records to release complete score of Porgy and Bess with an all Negro cast...Jose Ferrer will record speeches from Cyrano de Bergerac for Capitol...The Shakespeare records used by NBC are the property of Roscoe Haley, head elevator starter at the Whitehall Building... Variety's Five Top Album list headed by Victor's "Great Caruso". Runners-up include Decca's The King and I, Decca's Guys and Dolls, and Columbia's South Pacific...Decca's The King and I picked by Coleman, Mirror, as his Record Recommendation of the Week, while Watt, New Yorker, panned it as very disappointing...Watt also panned A Tree Grows in Brooklyn as disappointing.

' Green Room Department '

THEATRE NOT LUXURY...The theatre appears to be killing itself by catering only to the minority that can and will pay practically any price, condemns Herald Tribune editorial. It is doubtful if any city agency could police box office personnel and producers, as Commissioner of Licenses McCaffery has suggested. But his plan for a consolidated central ticket office is sound when we get around to providing comfortable theatres under a modern building code. The real house cleaning is not yet in prospect, and improvement can only come when the theatre develops a true understanding that its art is more than a luxury.

PULITZER PRIZE PANNED...Ninety per cent of the Pulitzer Advisory Board failed to see over 20 per cent of the season's presentations, Winchell is ready to bet. The committee may not have picked a Best American play, but millions of Americans who lined up at the box office didn't think the theatre had such a hard year. Statistically it adds up to some pretty bad ethics by the committee which is supposed to set standards.

USED CRITICS FATE...English version of "Monopoly" parlor game has players work their way through the theatre profession, relays Gardner, Herald Tribune. If they win everything in sight, they become producers. If they lose, they become drama critics.

COLEMAN BACKS CONFAB...Coleman, Mirror, will guarantee the costs of an intimate conference of top theatre leaders, as proposed by "Show Business" editorial. Critic suggests either Bernard Baruch, David Dubinsky, or Matthew Woll be named neutral chairman of group to work out general theatre problems.

CRITICS PREDICT...Gaby Rogers is name to watch at Westport Country Playhouse, says Coleman, Mirror...Barbara Ashley, Out of This World, deserves a TV try, suggests Francis, Billboard...If Ginger Rogers scores in her coming Broadway appearance, watch the flood of movie queens to New York, comments Rice, Post.

STILL MORE AWARDS...Gloria Swanson named "best actress of year" by Farleigh Dickenson College...Stock Managers Association will pick two newcomers as "most promising of season"...Committee for Negro in Arts gave scrolls to Peter Lawrence and Margaret Webster.

SHUBERT AID PRAISED...Lee Shubert's long time generosity toward his old friend, Al Woods is a fact most of the local obituary writers missed, comments WINS Martin Starr. Mr. Lee paid the bills for the ailing Woods for a long time, but he wanted fact kept secret.

FIRST "BEST" LIST...Dodd, Mead's "Best Plays of 1950-1951" as chosen by Chapman, News, will include Guys and Dolls, Darkness At Noon, The Autumn Garden, The Country Girl, Bell, Book and Candle, The Rose Tattoo, Billy Budd, Season in the Sun, Second Threshold and Affairs of State.

FINANCIAL FIGURING...Variety survey finds 1950-1951 season had nine hits, 41 failures, plus seven whose fate is not yet decided. Over five and a half million was invested by angels in the 83 productions shown. While over one and one-third million has already been distributed in profits.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Gibbs, New Yorker, dropped plans for musical adaptation of Zuleika Dobson, and will work on untitled comedy on the literary field...Kronenberger, Time, may have Rosalind Russell star in his The International Set, says Farrell, WT&S...June "Theatre Arts" features articles by Sylvester and Chapman, News; Rice, Post; Allison, Herald Tribune and Van Horne, WT&S...A Tree Grows In Brooklyn cast challenged Drama Desk to softball game.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

JUNE HAVOC...New star of Affairs of State promises to remain until it closes, she told Rice, Post. She believes some of her failures resulted from her quitting Pal Joey before it closed. At present her one wish is that Rodgers and Hammerstein will make a musical out of The Girl of the Golden West, in which she starred several summers ago at Westport...Fields, Mirror, discovered that the actress is a pet lover and statistician. She has appeared in 30 plays, 420 radio broadcasts, 12 TV shows and 26 movies. Her new apartment harbors four cats and two dogs, all of whom sleep with her.

LILLIAN HELLMAN...The Autumn Garden author believes that only hacks and amateurs base their characters on real life people, WCBS Margaret Arlen learned. The playwright's writing schedule is to work steadily for four hours per day; the exact hours making little difference. Because she thinks that only Shakespeare wrote "tragedies", she must disagree with critics who class her work in this type.

GEORGE BRANDT...Subway circuit producer may have the idea that will revive the road writes Sylvester, News. Brandt together with 19 other managers will furnish $50,000. They will sign a contract to produce five shows for the "new road". Season in the Sun and Black Chiffon will head the list early this fall.

THE BAIRDS...Pollock, Compass, investigated the magical coach houses on the West 70s where the masters of Flahooley's puppets create movies and new characters. The Bairds have ideas for TV puppets that will catch the fancy of kids and parents at the same time and educate both while they divert. It is clear that in their hands the puppets will always do only such things as would make any fine, upstanding, intelligent puppet proud.

BINNIE BARNES...New Twentieth Century lead is a bit superstitious about the name of her play, WCBS Bill Leonard discovered. Not only does she travel on the 20th Century Limited quite a bit, but she is signed to 20th Century Fox. Noel Coward also wrote a song of the same name for her in Cavalcade.

' Far Flung NY Critics '

PARIS...Jean Anouilh's Columbe is an interesting drama about the theatre, comments Watts, Post. The critic admitted that the time he should have spent play-going in the beautiful city that he hasn't seen since 1939, was spent in sentimental pilgrimages.

LONDON...A dearth of weighty plays on contemporary themes is apparent in entire Festival program, complains Fvyel, New Leader. But in spite of this, the summer promises the best British theatrical season within memory, with the highest possible level of acting.

TEXAS...Two Texas year round theatre ventures praised by Rice, Post. Margo Jones' Theatre '51 in Dallas and Albus and Rozan's Houston Playhouse both offer encouragement to groups and cities that want their own theatre in-the-round showcases. Jones' book on subject was highly recommended. Houston house, built this year to run arena productions has a special responsibility as a guide to other ventures.

' Legit Stuff '

Bell, Book and Candle will not reopen, as had been planned...New Haven RR "Show Train" brought 1,000 to see Call Me Madam...South Pacific has given over $100,000 to the Runyon Fund, says Winchell...Friar's Club will send "All Star Caravan" on hospital circuit...Stage Relief Fund disbanded...Round table discussion of Greek theatre held under sponsorship of Greek Archdiocese of North and South America...Registration for American Theatre Wing Professional Training Program closed for summer term...Free copies of "Before the Curtain Rises" booklet which explains producing problems, may be obtained from Thomas Hammond, 1650 Broadway, New York.